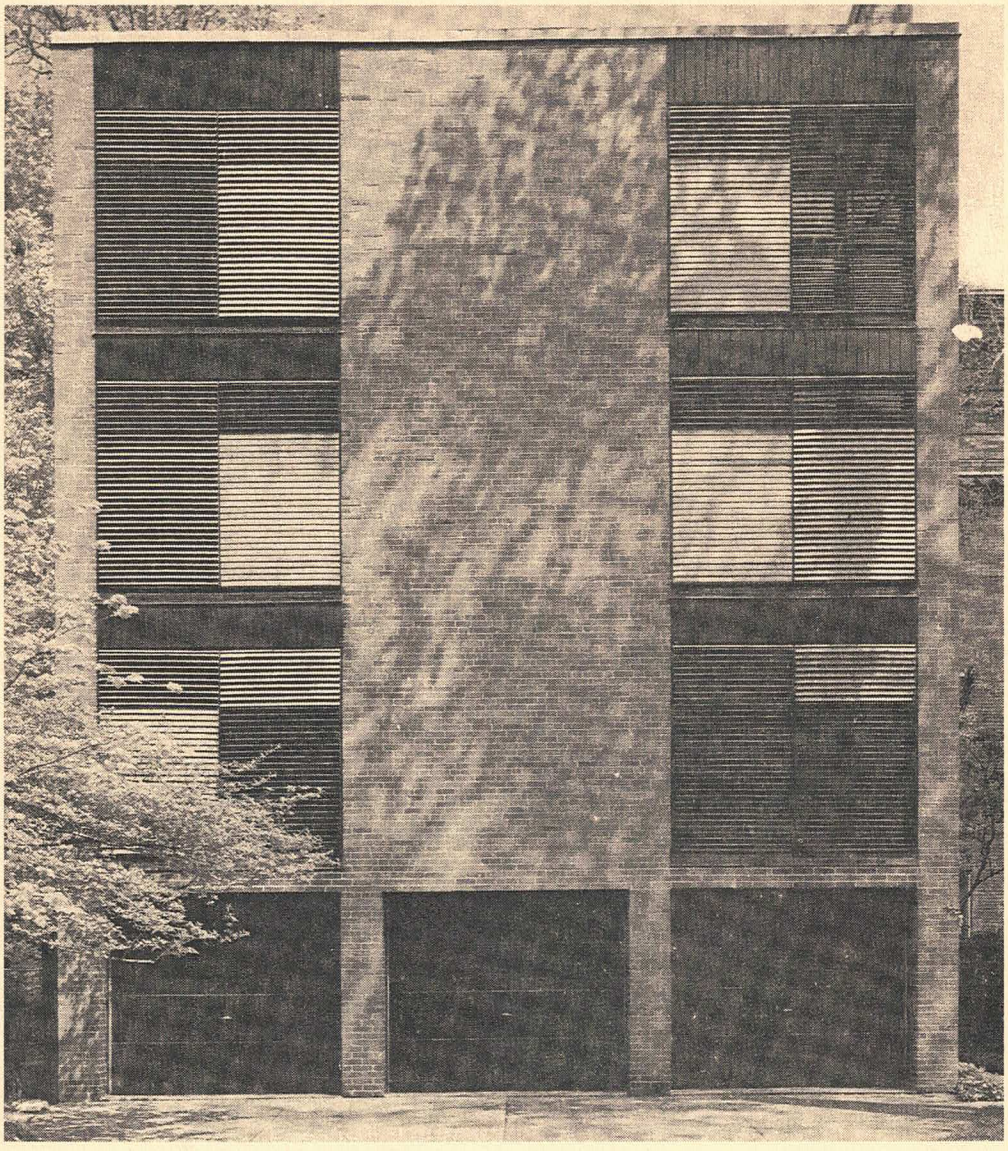
PRELIMINARY STAFF SUMMARY OF INFORMATION



Keck-Gottschalk-Keck Apartments

5551 S. University Ave.

SUBMITTED TO THE COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS
MARCH 2, 1994

CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
Valerie B. Jarrett, Commissioner

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. It is responsible for recommending to the City Council that individual buildings, sites, objects, or entire districts be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law.

The Commission makes its recommendation to the City Council only after careful consideration. The process begins with an extensive staff study, summarized in this report, which discusses the historical and architectural background and significance of the proposed landmark.

The next step--a preliminary determination by the Commission that the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration--is important because it places the review of building permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission during the remainder of the designation process.

This Preliminary Summary of Information is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation proceedings. Only language contained within the Commission's recommendation to the City Council should be regarded as final.

COVER: The strikingly abstract facade of the Keck-Gottschalk-Keck Apartments is one of the earliest examples in Chicago of the modern architecture associated with the International Style.

KECK-GOTTSCHALK-KECK APARTMENTS

5551 S. University Ave.

Architects: George Fred Keck and William Keck

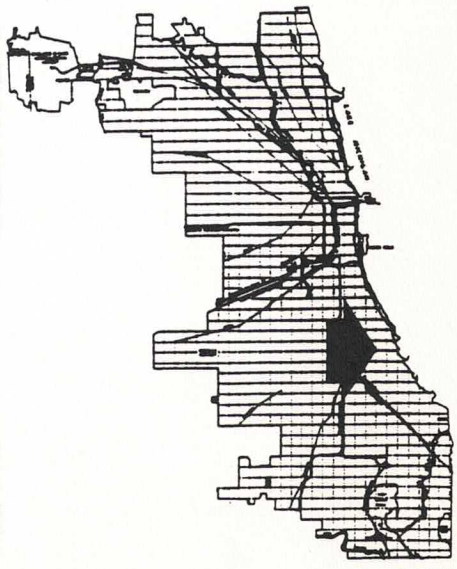
Date: 1937

Befitting its proximity to the intellectually charged atmosphere of the University of Chicago, the three-flat structure at 5551 University challenges traditional ideas toward residential architecture. Although built prior to World War II, its appearance remains contemporary looking nearly 60 years after its construction.

The Keck-Gottschalk-Keck Apartments represents a common Chicago building type, the three-flat; however, its forward-looking design is anything but common. Rather, it reflects an aggressive approach toward architecture that has been the hallmark of design in Chicago for more than a century.

In the design of the building for themselves and their long-time friends, George Fred Keck and William Keck combined new architectural technologies with a fresh set of aesthetic values. The Keck-Gottschalk-Keck Apartments is important at two levels: as a building whose design promised a better way to live in the ubiquitous Chicago three-flat; and as a building whose formal elements are so sophisticatedly arranged as to create architecture that is timeless in its appeal.

In addition, it belongs to a small but prestigious family of buildings built in the mid-1930s that testify to the legacy of expressive originality which has always informed Chicago's architectural community.



Locator Map

The partnership of Keck and Keck is widely recognized for its pioneering efforts in architectural technology and design. The firm is best known for architecture that is aesthetically progressive, environmentally efficient, and technologically up-to-date. Among Keck and Keck's works in Chicago, 5551 University is the best example of their guiding architectural principles.

Chicago's Architecture Between the Wars

Chicago's international reputation for progressive architectural thought and design stems from a succession of technological and aesthetic innovations--from the balloon frame of the 1830s through the modern commercial skyscraper of the 1880s to the open-planned houses of the early 20th-century Prairie School.

This spirit of innovation in Chicago architecture also extended between the first and second world wars, and, although not as well recognized, the architecture of this period is every bit as influential as other more widely heralded achievements.

Between 1920 and 1940, modern architectural thought in Chicago was fueled by movements in Europe. Particularly relevant was the International Style, so called because of the similarity of works among architects throughout Europe. The style rejected traditional architectural styles. Its architects were utopian in thought, repudiating what they perceived as outmoded ways of building and embracing new, technologically-oriented methods.

International Style buildings were commonly of concrete, glass, and steel. They were starkly cubic in form with flat walls and roofs. They lacked traditional overhanging eaves and had large expanses of glass. A complete absence of ornament was also typical.

Other, less dogmatic, movements informed the architecture of the period, including Art Deco--with its geometric forms and colorful patterns and finishes--and Art Moderne, whose style was

slightly more refined than Art Deco, exhibiting a streamlined appearance.

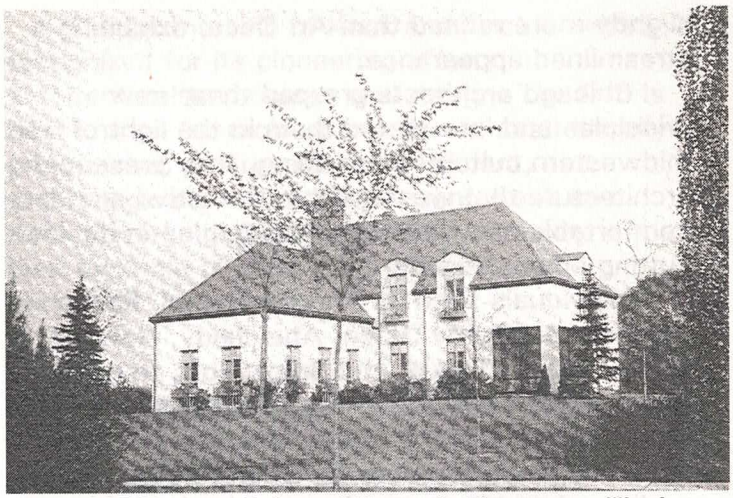
Chicago architects grasped these new principles and interpreted them in the light of midwestern culture. In so doing, they presented architecture that was at once distinctive and comfortable and, most of all, engaging in its cutting edge character.

Individuals such as Andrew Rebori, Paul Schweikher, Henry Dubin, Abel Faidy, Howard Fisher, Robert Tague, and Bruce Goff, to name a few, would join with the Keck brothers in re-inventing the designs of the American house. In departing from the more formalistic canons of traditional architecture, they emphasized the satisfaction of the client and the livability of their designs rather than the cold, impersonal, universal "machine for living," as historians have characterized the International Style.

The Early Work of Keck and Keck

The 50-year professional partnership of George Fred Keck and William Keck brought about some of the most important contributions to the

George Fred Keck and his brother William Keck, as pictured in about 1940.



The 1927 Newton B. Laurel House in Flossmoor, Illinois, exemplifies Fred Keck's early residential designs.

continuation of Chicago's legacy for modern architecture. Their state-of-the-art designs reflect the technological, aesthetic, and environmental issues that reshaped American lives immediately preceding and following the second World War.

To build things and construct them well came naturally to the Keck brothers. The eldest and fourth of five sons, George Fred (1895-1980) and William (1908-) Keck were born in the rural community of Waterton, Wisconsin. Here, their grandfather, a German cabinetmaker, had established a family furniture manufacturing business in 1848. If architecture was their vocation, each would privately pursue an artistic avocation as well; Fred as a watercolorist and William as a photographer.

Fred Keck, as the older brother preferred to be called, studied engineering for one year at the University of Wisconsin but then transferred to the University of Illinois to enroll in the architectural engineering program. After employment as a draftsman in a number of Chicago offices, Fred Keck opened a private practice under the name "George Fred Keck, Architect," at 612 N. Michigan Ave. in 1926. During the late 1920s and early '30s, Keck adapted his personal taste for modern designs to the more conservative inclinations of his clients, designing eclectic houses inspired by American colonial and English rural architecture, albeit with much simplified

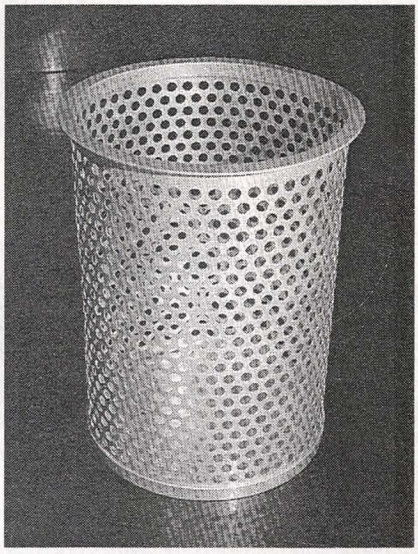
forms. One notable exception was the Art Deco-inspired 1929 Miralago Ballroom (destroyed by fire in 1932) in Wilmette, Illinois.

Fred Keck had a natural affinity for the European modernist design philosophy. He was a regular subscriber to *Pencil Points* and *Architectural Record*, two periodicals which exposed American architects to the European avant-garde. His library included recently released architectural publications in French, German, and English, and included the 1910 Wasmuth edition of Frank Lloyd Wright's work and the 1927 English translation of Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture*.

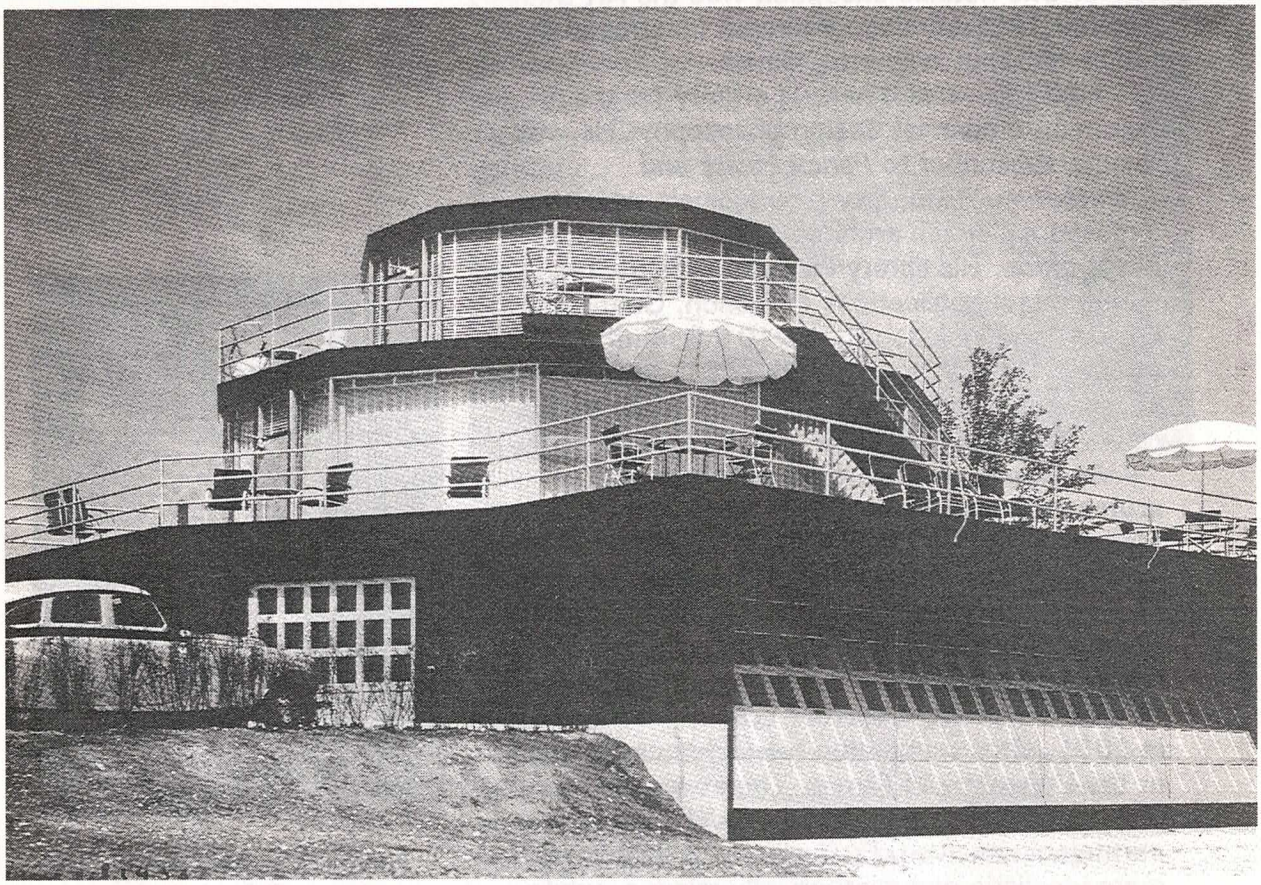
At this same time, Keck established a professional relationship with Austrian artist Marianne Willisch (1897-1984), a respected interior designer who introduced Keck to contemporary European decorative arts. Together, they created custom-built, modern furniture then not widely available.

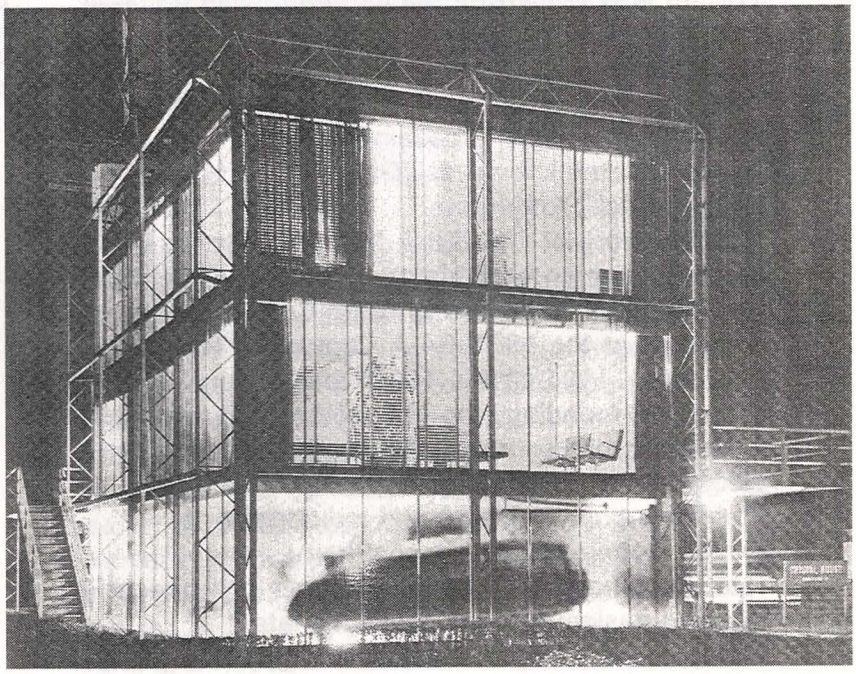
Keck's younger brother William joined the firm in 1931, after completing his architectural degree at the University of Illinois. The styles of the two men complemented each other well. As the partnership evolved, Fred was considered the more idealistic and aesthetically-minded, while William was known for his careful research and attention to detail. William developed the specifications for the houses, and did much of the field supervision. In 1946, after returning from Navy service, William became a partner in the firm which became known as "George Fred Keck, William Keck, Architects."

The work of Fred Keck first gained widespread attention with his revolutionary designs for the House of Tomorrow and the Crystal House displayed at the 1933-34 A Century of Progress Exposition. Held on the 100th anniversary of Chicago's founding, the fair celebrated scientific advancements in transportation, communication, electricity, and agriculture of the past century. The fair's popular Home and Industrial Arts Exhibit, where the two model homes were featured, showcased new directions in American housing design and embodied the latest in architectural thought and technology.



Fred Keck would often design custom-built furniture for his clients. This aluminum wastebasket was used in the Keck-Gottschalk-Keck Apartments.





Fred Keck's contributions to the 1933-34 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago were two forward-looking designs for housing Americans in the future, the House of Tomorrow (above) and the Crystal House (right). Technical innovations included all-electric kitchens, central air-conditioning, and a built-in airplane hangar.

The House of Tomorrow, three-stories high with a twelve-sided floor plan, had sun decks with metal pipe railings, storefront plate glass windows, a fully electric kitchen, and wedge-shaped rooms. A garage with electrically operated doors housed a Silver Arrow automobile and, in a leap of faith in the future transportation needs of the average family, a Curtiss-Wright Sport Biplane in its own hangar.

Even more astonishing was the Crystal House, sheathed entirely in glass supported by exterior steel trusses. The interior featured streamlined modern elegance with furniture by Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Marcel Breuer.

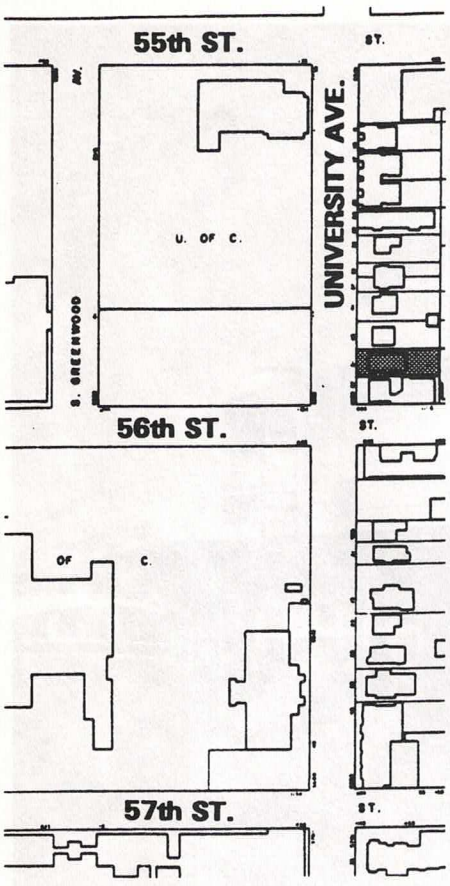
Both the House of Tomorrow (moved, following the fair, to Beverly Shores, Indiana, and now owned by the National Park Service) and the Crystal House (razed after the fair) were as radical as any architecture built in Chicago up to that time. Their avant-garde character helped open the public's eyes to modernism.

While Keck's world's fair houses appeared unorthodox to the general public, they were not meant to startle. As Keck explained in a publicity statement issued at the time, "They were laboratory houses and were designed not to be different or tricky but to attempt seriously to determine whether better ideas and designs for living could be found."

5551 University

Fred Keck's main concern during the 1930s and early 1940s was to familiarize the American public with modern architecture. In a May, 1942, *Architectural Forum article*, he wrote:

> **No intelligent person would build in the traditional manner today; it is only the badly trained architect who still harps on traditional at all. Houses, like religion, are bound up with emotion and tradition, both obscure and vague and indefinable terms. Get rid of emotion and tradition and get to the facts and needs of contemporary construction, and you get good results.**



The Keck-Gottschalk-Keck Apartments (black) is located next to the campus of the University of Chicago. Across the street is the Fieldhouse; at lower left is the Regenstein Library.

As an architect, what better way "to practice what you preach" than in a house you design for yourself, which is what the Kecks would do at 5551 University in the Hyde Park neighborhood. In keeping with the Kecks' steadfast belief that only new architecture and new technologies could adequately serve contemporary housing needs, the older house that stood on the site was demolished to make way for the construction of a new building. The house, in effect, became a laboratory for their architectural principles.

The Kecks designed the three-flat as a cooperative venture with their personal friends, Louis Gottschalk, a professor of art history at the University of Chicago, and his wife. The decision to build a three-flat, rather than three separate single-family homes, allowed the families to afford a relatively more expensive and spacious lot.

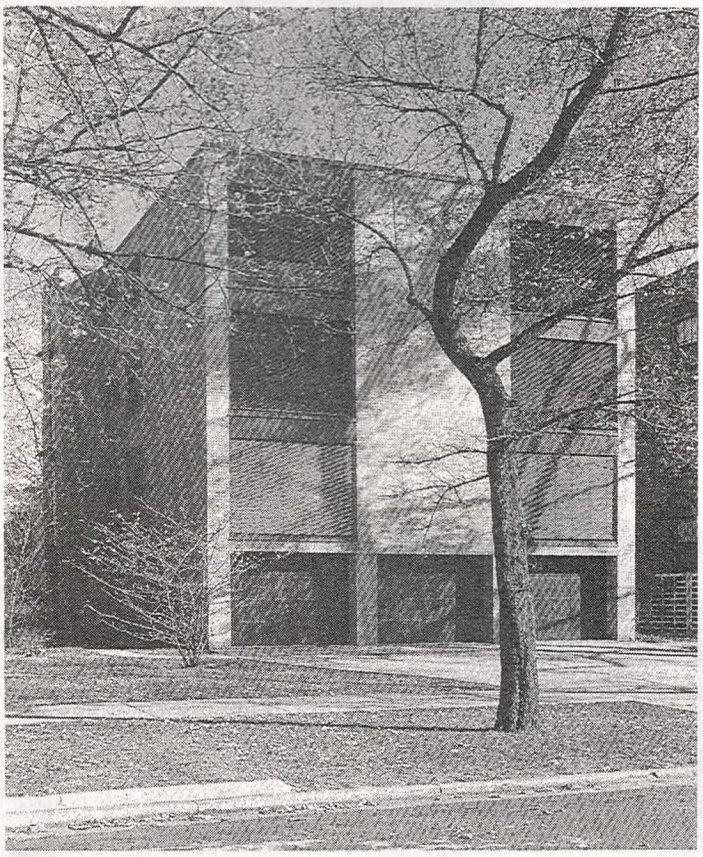
The Keck-Gottschalk-Keck Apartments building is the firm's oldest surviving building in Chicago, and it is the first to incorporate the progressive social and design characteristics for which they are best known. Sited on a long narrow lot, this four-story structure is arranged with the three living floors above a three-car garage, which was grouped horizontally across the ground level. The principal (west) facade has a strong geometric character, composed of two vertical bays of windows, flanking the central masonry wall. This arrangement opens up the front wall to an unusual degree, allowing a maximum amount of light and air inside.

The masonry and windows above the ground floor are carried on steel beams spanning the brick piers between the garage bays. A masonry core, housing the formal and service stairs, is located midway between the west and east walls. The entrance is in the south wall, recessed from the street.

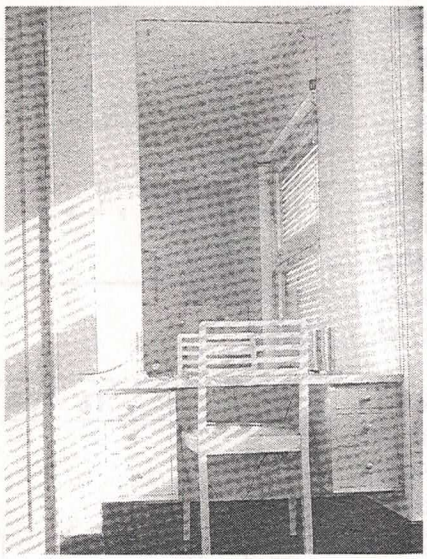
The facade is striking for the well-proportioned relationship of the solid masonry wall to the void of the large window openings. Each of the window openings is masked by dark-aluminum, external blinds. The blinds are a sharp contrast to the brightness of the red-orange brick walls.

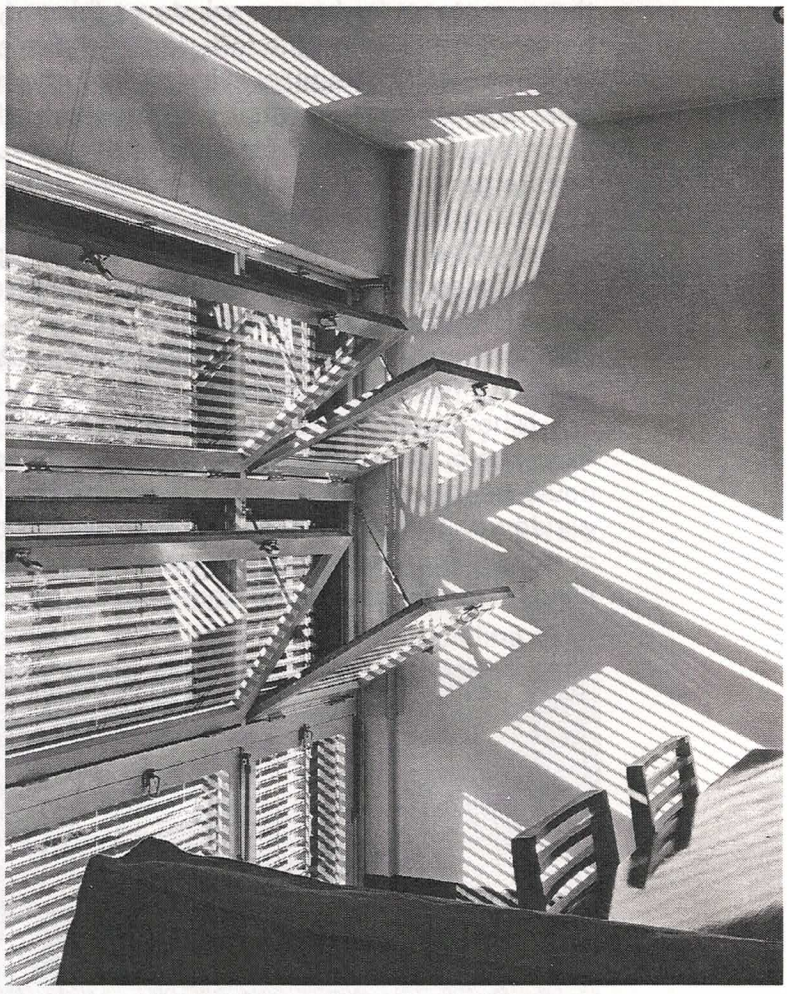
Behind the blinds, each opening is filled with three, rectangular hopper windows (hinged at the bottom), stacked on the left side of the opening, and three pairs of square windows on the right side. Just as the individual windows behind the louvers can be opened for different air circulation requirements, so also can the louvers be controlled individually to augment the flow of light and air. Changes in the opening and closing of the louvers also affect the aesthetics of the street elevation, producing a broad array of compositions reminiscent of abstract or cubist paintings (see cover photo).

(The current blinds system is an alteration from the original scheme, in which the blinds could be raised high enough to expose the windows. That system had to be replaced due to corrosion from airborne pollutants. Although the blinds can still be opened and closed from the

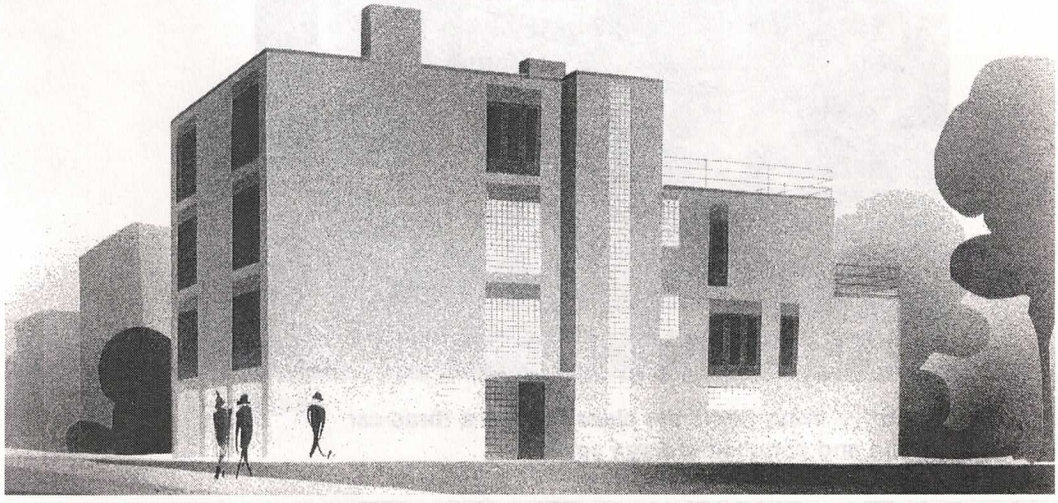


The three living floors are placed above a three-car garage and common storage space.





Among the modern amenities of the Keck Apartments were: built-in furniture (above), external louvered blinds (seen in interior view, right), and the use of glass block and outdoor sun terraces (south building elevation, below).



interior, they now are permanently mounted and cannot be raised.)

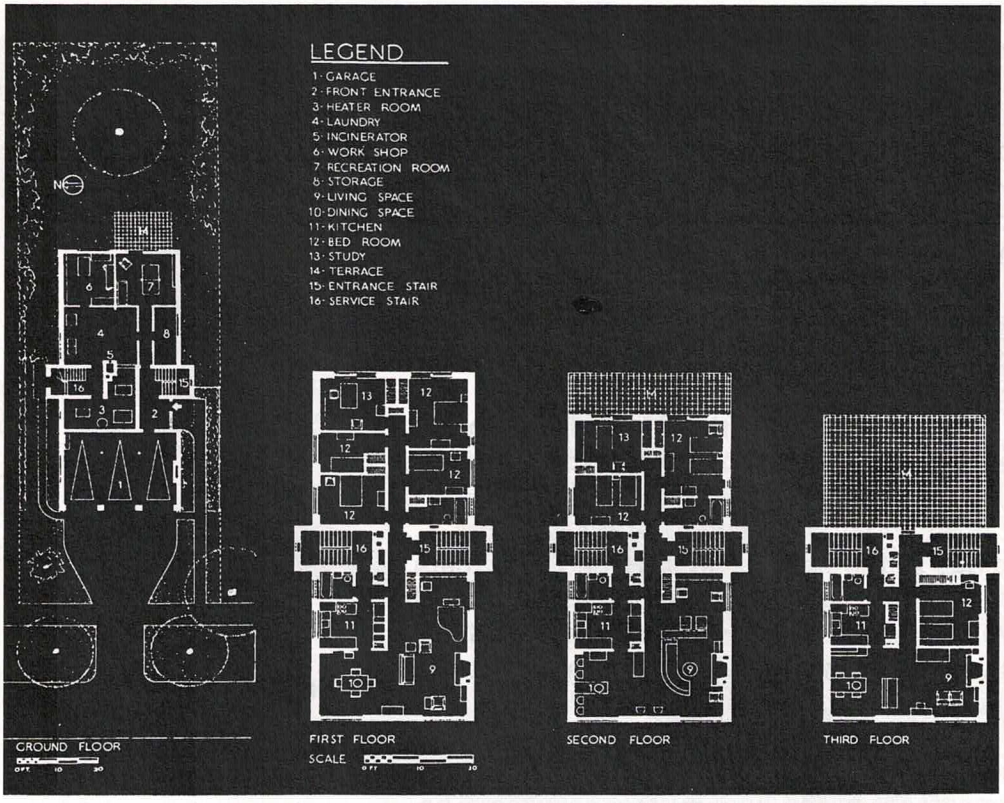
Beyond the blinds' aesthetic qualities, they reflect the Kecks' interest in using technical innovations to further social and environmental concerns. Fred Keck's inspiration for this design purportedly came from his observation of operable external metal and wood shutters during his Army tour of duty in France during World War I. In 1935, working with the National Lock Company, he developed an experimental, exterior Venetian blind for solar protection.

The prominence of the garage is another reflection of the changing social order, with the Kecks' frank acceptance of the automobile as a part of the urban residence. Although most buildings at the time--even in Hyde Park where there are few alleys--put garages to the rear, the Kecks prominently located this garage at the front. The garage, as well as mechanical and storage facilities, fill the grade-level.

The placement of utility spaces at grade, rather than below grade, was another advancement based on new technologies. The newer mechanical systems of houses no longer required the larger spaces given over to them in older, subgrade basements.

As austere and formal as the street facade is, the other elevations are considerably more lively. The east elevation has a series of stepped-back terraces, overlooking a common garden in the back. Decks and terraces became integral parts of contemporary designs in the 1930s as Americans discovered outdoor life and sunbathing.

The fenestration, or window pattern, on the sides is considerably more random than on the front, and openings on the side elevations are filled with glass block, representing an early use of this product in the U.S. Structural glass block was developed in Europe during the 1920s but only became available in the United States in the 1930s. Produced in a variety of sizes and patterns, glass block was valued for its translucency and insulating qualities, making it useful for buildings with undesirable views or noisy environments.



Floor plans of the Keck-Gottschalk-Keck Apartments demonstrate how each unit was designed to meet the particular needs of each family. For example, the first floor had more interior space, while the second and third floors included large terraces.

There are three apartments, the floor plans diminishing in size from bottom to top. The first floor fills out the entire footprint of the building; the second floor has an open terrace at the rear, covering approximately 20 percent of the footprint; and the top floor, exclusive of its terrace, comprises only half of the footprint. (A bedroom was subsequently built on part of the third-floor terrace.)

The location of the stairways provides the opportunity to divide each of the larger apartments into two units without major structural changes. This was a specific consideration by the Kecks to give the building a high degree of flexibility for future uses and owners.

The interior layouts of the first and second-floor units combined the newer-style, "fluid" space plans--for the living and dining rooms--and conventional room arrangements for the private areas. The living and dining rooms dominate the front half of the apartments and are configured in an L-shape; the kitchen and a bathroom fill out the plan of the front half. The bedrooms, a

study, and another bathroom are at the rear on either side of a central hallway.

There is no definite division between the living and dining rooms. The spaces flow into one another, making the front half of the apartments very spacious and allowing latitude in their use. Each apartment also contains the traditional American amenity of a fireplace. The spatial characteristics of the plans are not as innovative as others by the Kecks or their contemporaries. However, this is due to the confining characteristics inherent in an urban lot and a small apartment building.

Reflecting up-to-date trends, the apartments have a large amount of built-in furniture. For simplicity of effect and saving of floor space, bookcases, desks, dressing tables, cabinets, and chests of drawers, and other storage systems become virtually a part of the interior architecture.

The stairhall has an high-tech look, in keeping with the Kecks' appreciation of the expressive qualities of materials. In a brochure for the 1933 House of Tomorrow, Fred Keck admitted that the industrial character of these materials seemed odd, but that they would come to be appreciated "as right and proper and beautiful as we now consider Elizabethan exposed half-timbers and ceiling beams of wood." The staircase, encased within a white-painted brick wall, is of steel with non-slip cement treads, relatively short risers, and a continuous tubular railing.

Critical Evaluations of 5551

The Keck-Gottschalk-Keck Apartments has received a great deal of attention over the years, ranging from the casual comments of passersby to the formal critiques of design professionals.

William Keck still recalls the memory of a neighbor passing by the house while his brother, accompanied by the Gottschalk's son, was shoveling the walk. Talking to himself, but in a voice loud enough for Fred Keck and the boy to hear, the neighbor opined, "That's a lousy house; someone ought to put a bomb to it." Fred Keck

The modern appearance of the Keck Apartments is in stark contrast to its neighbors' more traditional designs, which date from 1905-15.

had to explain to the Gottschalk's son what he had learned from his own experience: that aesthetic judgments can be harsh.

The misgivings that most Americans had to modern architecture in the 1930s was reflected in a survey by *Architectural Forum* and *Fortune Quarterly* in 1935. Just 35 percent expressed a preference for the "modern" style, while 59 percent favored more traditional early American or English-style houses. According to Keck scholar Robert Boyce, the antagonism to modern architecture may have been based on the perception that modern architecture was elitist and financially out of reach for most Americans at that time.

Appreciation for the Keck Apartments, however, has long existed. For example, in 1960, when the house was less than 25 years old, it was one of 39 buildings identified as "Chicago Architectural Landmarks" by the Commission on Chicago Architectural Landmarks, the predecessor to the present Commission on Chicago Landmarks. (These landmark "designations," however, had no legal protection.) In fact, the building was only one of five post-World War I structures cited by the Commission.

In 1976, the building was included in an important exhibit called "Chicago Architects," which highlighted the influence of local architects. Referred to as among the best early local manifestations of the International Style, the Keck-Gottschalk-Keck flats was depicted as "a

work notable for its simple surface articulation and carefully balanced proportions."

The highly original character of the building's abstract form also is emphasized in *Chicago's Famous Buildings*, where the building is distinguished as "one of the earliest examples in Chicago of the modern architecture associated with the International Style." The book further explains that the facade departs from traditional design by "precluding the ornament still commonly practiced at the time by the designers in the Art Deco mode."

Most recently, the building was pictured in the 1993 *AIA Guide to Chicago* where it is described as "timeless first generation modernism."

The Influence of Keck and Keck

The influence of Keck and Keck, and Fred Keck in particular, is twofold: first, for the quality of their architecture, which was influential aesthetically and technologically; and, secondly, for their roles as educators and mentors to three generations of architects, including some of the most prominent practitioners today.

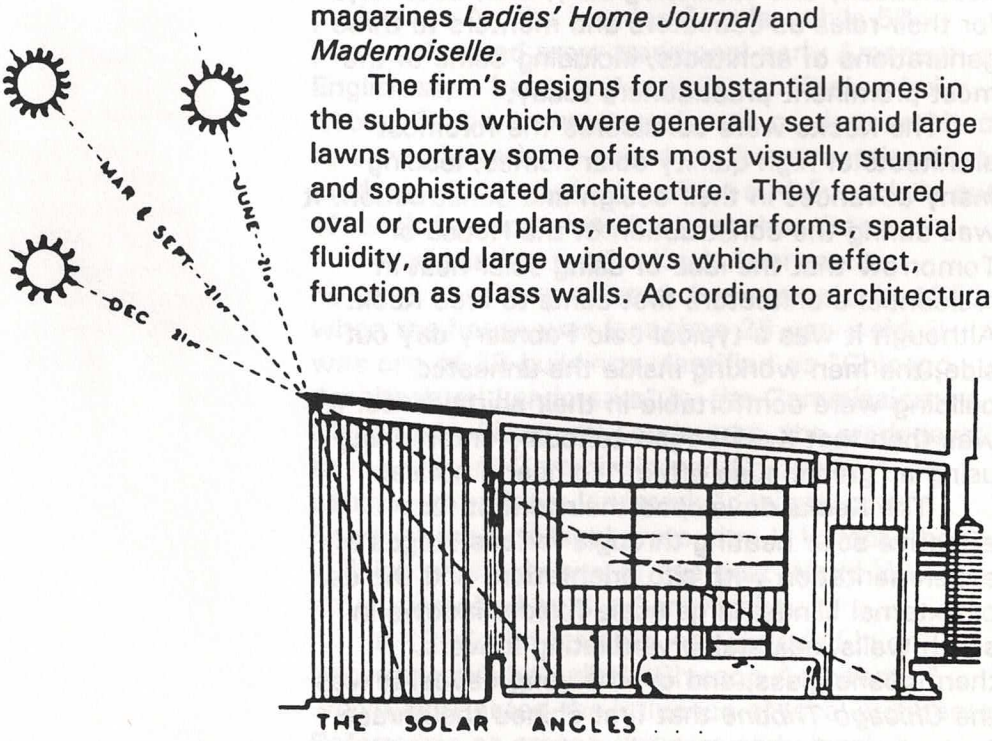
The Kecks were considered the foremost architects of high-quality solar homes, leading many advances in their design and construction. It was during the construction of the House of Tomorrow that the idea of using solar heat in residential architecture first came to Fred Keck. Although it was a typical cold February day outside, the men working inside the unheated building were comfortable in their shirtsleeves. It was then that Keck began seriously entertaining using a "greenhouse effect" to heat a house.

The Kecks developed their format for effective solar heating through various stages of experimentation with site orientation, and the use of external blinds, large scale fixed windows in south walls, adjustable ventilating louvers, thermopane glass, and overhanging eaves. It was the *Chicago Tribune* that first coined the phrase "solar house" and established Keck and Keck in the forefront of American solar architecture.

One of the firm's longtime interests was improving the quality of handsome, livable, modestly priced housing for the mass market. This was made possible by prefabricated, ready-to-assemble building components, which effectively reduced production costs and lowered house purchase prices for the buyer. The Kecks joined forces with Edward Green and Alin Thor, homebuilders in Rockford, Illinois, to engineer a project called Green's Ready-Built. Mass-produced beginning in 1947, well over a hundred of the firm's designs were distributed throughout Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Missouri, and Minnesota.

The architecture of Keck and Keck was widely available to the public. During World War II, Fred Keck consulted with companies that would be involved in peacetime construction. In 1942, he created "A Design for Better Living" for the Celotex Corporation and designed a "Home for Tomorrow's Happy Living" for Revere Copper and Brass Inc. He wrote about solar housing for the January, 1944, issue of *Reader's Digest* and received two magazine-sponsored house commissions from the widely read women's magazines *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Mademoiselle.*

The firm's designs for substantial homes in the suburbs which were generally set amid large lawns portray some of its most visually stunning and sophisticated architecture. They featured oval or curved plans, rectangular forms, spatial fluidity, and large windows which, in effect, function as glass walls. According to architectural



Keck and Keck were trailblazers in the area of solar housing. This is a study for a 1941 house in Illinois.

historian Narciso Menocal, who helped to organize a 1980 retrospective exhibit of the career of Keck and Keck, "Slab-like free-standing fireplaces of travertine marble, wide views opening into well-tended forest-like gardens, and sparse furnishings by the best modern designers give these houses an aura of restrained elegance that makes them important examples of what may well be the golden age of modern architecture in America."

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Kecks also became involved in large-scale urban renewal projects, designing several buildings and complexes for the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), Chicago Dwelling Association, and the Hyde Park-Kenwood Redevelopment area. Always responsive to societal concerns, the Kecks wanted to improve their own Hyde Park neighborhood aesthetically as well as physically.

The Keck and Keck office was the training ground for a number of important architects who admired their pioneering work. Among those who worked in the Keck office were Ralph Rapson and Stanley Tigerman. Rapson, a student of Eliel Saarinen's at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Detroit and later a professor at the Illinois Institute of Technology and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, recalled that, "working in the Keck office was relaxing and rewarding....Fred was a realist who was able to assimilate traditional technology with higher technology." Bertrand Goldberg, the architect of Marina City and other influential buildings, never worked for the Kecks but was a frequent visitor to the office during the mid-1930s and has acknowledged Fred Keck's influence on him.

Fred Keck's credentials as a teacher and mentor were established early on in his career. From 1938 to 1944, he was the chairman of the architecture department of the New Bauhaus, a school founded in Chicago in 1937 by Lazlo Moholy-Nagy as a continuation of the German Bauhaus school.

In his eulogy of Fred Keck in 1981, noted Chicago architect Stanley Tigerman described how he had come to the realization that his former employer "was by *far* the major figure who

Keck and Keck's innovations in prefabricated housing were used in hundreds of post-World War II houses in the Midwest.

had been overlooked by the polemicists of modernism." He also related how during the 1970s he constantly delighted in seeing how architects were stunned by their own "discovery" of Keck's work. "But then," wrote Tigerman:

> wonderfully enough in the winter of [Fred Keck's] life, things began to change. In the end, the intelligentsia became aware of Keck's historical importance, and as architects scurried to establish a serious energy policy, Keck became more interesting indeed.

The appreciation of Keck and Keck's work, and that of their contemporaries, has continued to grow. There is a renewed appreciation for the exceptional architecture that was produced during the desperate years of the Depression.

The design of the Keck-Gottschalk-Keck Apartments, which is one of the best of these modern buildings, remains as vigorous today as when it was first built. It was a dramatic design originally and it has the same forward-looking quality today, still secure in its well-reasoned design principles.

Keck & Keck • Architects

The work of Keck and Keck has been cataloged in numerous books and exhibits. Pictured here is the Edward W. Morehouse Residence (1936-37) in Madison, Wisconsin.

Elvehjem Museum of Art University of Wisconsin - Madison

APPENDICES

Criteria for Designation

Designation of the Keck-Gottschalk-Keck Apartments as a Chicago Landmark is recommended because the building meets three of the criteria for landmark designation as set forth in Section 2-210-620 of the Chicago Municipal Code.

CRITERION 1

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

Chicago's international reputation for progressive architectural thought and design is unparalleled. Architectural historians have carefully chronicled the commercial designs of the Chicago School of the 1880s and 1890s, the residential Prairie School of Frank Lloyd Wright, and the local work of Mies van der Rohe. Omitted from the chronology of achievement is the decade between World War I and II. Now that era is being re-evaluated with a renewed appreciation. The Keck-Gottschalk-Keck Apartments, built in 1937, is one of the first Chicago buildings to demonstrate the receptivity of Chicago architects to the avant-garde architecture then being produced in Europe. 5551 University belongs to a small but prestigious family of buildings of that time which testify to the legacy of expressive originality which has always informed Chicago's architectural community.

Critical acclaim for 5551 University has come from a variety of sources. For example, in 1960 when the house was less than 25 years old, it was one of 39 buildings identified as "Chicago Architectural Landmarks" by the predecessor commission to the present Commission on Chicago Landmarks. The building has been included in all four editions of *Chicago's Famous Buildings*. Most recently, the building is pictured in the 1993 *AIA Guide to Chicago* where it is described as "timeless first generation modernism."

CRITERION 4

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.

5551 University is distinguished as one of the best early local examples in Chicago of the modern architecture associated with the International Style. Few, if any examples of this style exist in the inventory of Chicago's streetscapes. This is a building whose overall quality of design is so sophisticated that its appearance remains contemporary looking nearly 60 years after its construction.

Incorporated into the three-flat were a number of amenities now commonplace but then considered new: built-in furniture, glass block for insulation and privacy, outdoor sundecks, and fluid space planning. By placing the garage at the front of the house, the Kecks recognized a new social order--the importance of the automobile in 20th century American family life.

Other innovations included the placing of all utilities at grade as newer mechanical systems no longer required the larger spaces of older, subgrade basements. The Kecks gained lasting fame for their expertise in solar architecture, and the exterior louvered blinds on the Keck-Gottschalk-Keck Apartments demonstrate an early experiment in this field. Also novel in the building was the high tech look of the staircase and stairhall, where no attempt was made to conceal the nature of the industrial materials used in its construction.

CRITERION 5

Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

While the work of the brothers George Fred Keck and William Keck was often on the cutting edge of building technology, never was it so experimental as to be uncomfortable or unlivable. The design of 5551 University, the building housing both of their flats as well as that of long-time friends, demonstrated the Kecks' philosophy. These were architects who wanted to share their convictions about a contemporary, functional approach to residential architecture with the public. Hence, they designed world's fair model houses, experimented with solar heating, developed new construction materials and prefabrication, and were widely published not only in the professional architectural journals but the mass market magazines as well.

For over fifty years, since the firm was founded in 1926, Keck and Keck made a continuous and prolific contribution to the portfolio of fine residential architecture, not only in Chicago but throughout the Midwest. Architectural historians have only recently acknowledged and correctly assessed Keck and Keck's role as important pioneers of the modern movement in Chicago.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

Based on its evaluation of the Keck-Gottschalk-Keck Apartments, the staff recommends that all exterior aspects of the building be identified as significant historical and architectural features.

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Additional material used in the preparation of this report is on file and available to the public in the offices of the Landmarks Division of the Department of Planning and Development.

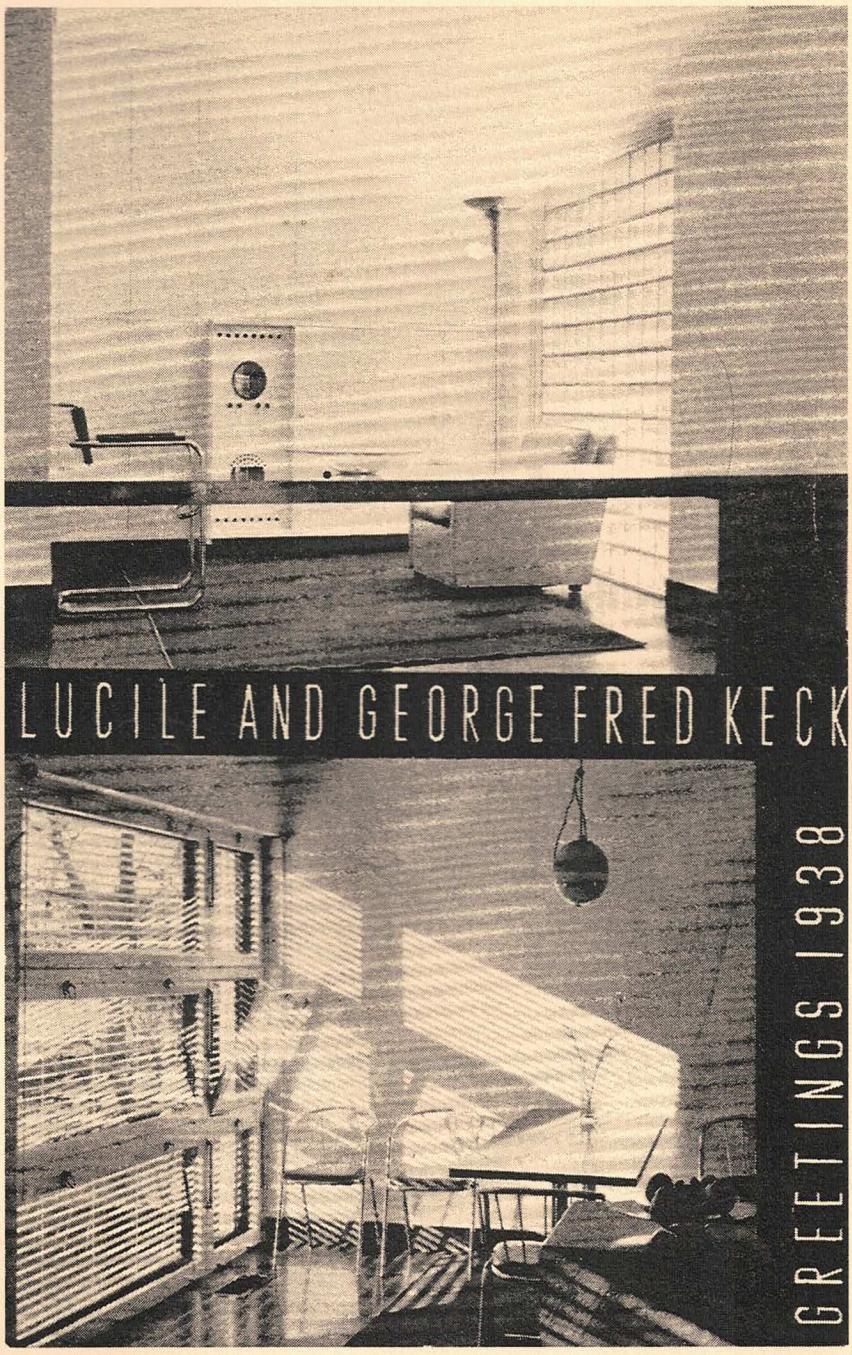
Acknowledgments

CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
Valerie B. Jarrett, Commissioner
Charles Thurow, Deputy Commissioner

Staff
Meredith Taussig, research and writing
Timothy Barton, editing
Dwight Martin, production
Alicia Mazur, layout
James Peters, editing and layout

Sources of Illustrations
Architectural Review (December, 1940)
(p. 12)
Art Institute of Chicago
(Inside back cover)
Chicago Department of Planning and Development
(pp. 8, 14)
Chicago Historical Society
(p. 10 bottom)
From 1980 exhibit catalogue *Keck & Keck-Architects*
(cover, pp. 6 bottom, 18)
From *Keck and Keck* (1993)
(p. 3)
Hedrich-Blessing, Chicago, from *Keck and Keck*(1993)
(pp. 6(top), 16, 17)
William Keck, from *Keck and Keck*(1993)
(pp. 4, 5, 9, 10 top)



Their pride in their new home was evident when George Fred and Lucile Keck used photographs of the interior of their new flat at 5551 S. University to illustrate their 1938 Christmas card. The apartment had been furnished with pieces originally custom designed and built for the House of Tomorrow displayed at the 1933-34 Century of Progress Exposition.

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